

SAVING HISTORIC LANSDALE:3

Shiloh Lodge: History's in the facade

By **DICK SHEARER**

What to do about the former Shiloh Lodge Masonic Temple at 311 W. Main St.?

Ask a hundred people, get a hundred different responses. It is a quandary that has festered for a decade now with no resolution in sight and few concrete suggestions on the table.

Dedicated in the fall of 1913, the Masonic Temple was *THE* definitive building on Main Street if you place the train station in a separate category. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* declared it "one of the most complete Masonic buildings in this part of the state".

This was no idle boast. Stand across Main Street and look at the façade, keeping in mind that what you see today is pretty much what you would have seen in 1913. It's not a stretch to imagine the sense of pride Lansdale residents felt when this imposing building was added to the downtown streetscape.

But it was always something of an outsider as the borough grew into the commercial hub

of the region. The Masonic Temple was the property of a private fraternity and admission to its inner treasures was usually limited to Shiloh Lodge members until just a few years ago.

While the façade stood guard over Main Street and customers regularly patronized its two storefronts – Bartholomew's Men Store and Jeanne's Fashions – few non-Masons had a soft spot for its heritage.

In reality, the Temple has attracted more attention in the last decade since Shiloh Lodge sold it to the borough as membership declined and maintenance costs increased.

The plan was to convert it into a performing arts center and in preparation for that most of the temple's original interior behind the facade was ripped out and a new n entrance was constructed on the Madison Street side.

The plan, as we now know, flopped and all bets are off as far as what happens next.

What we do know from a historical standpoint is that the façade remains an important and largely unchanged part of Lansdale's 20th century history. No matter what happens with the rest of the building that stoic façade demands long-term preservation.





1913: Masonic Cornerstone Ceremony

Leaders of the Free and Accepted Masons and the community gathered to dedicate Shiloh Lodge.

Previous page: The Grand Hall as it appeared approximately 10 years ago.

